



IU BLOOMINGTON

# EMERGING AREAS OF RESEARCH

## Abstract Template -- Due June 30, 2017

Title of initiative to be proposed:

Mediated Consciousness: A Cognitive Humanities Approach

Name of lead PI, with title, department/school:

Fritz Breithaupt, Germanic Studies

Key team member names and departments/schools (up to 10 names):

Peter M. Todd, Cognitive Science and Psychology (co-PI); Marco Arnaudo, French & Italian Studies; M. Elizabeth Grabe, The Media School; Allen Hahn, Theatre, Drama & Contemporary Dance; Sandra Kuebler, Linguistics; Robert F. Potter, The Media School; Aina Puce, Psychological & Brain Sciences; Bret Rothstein, Art History; Eliot Smith, Psychological & Brain Sciences; Joan Linton, English

Description of area to be proposed. What constitutes this area of research or creative activity as emerging?  
(Word limit=500)

By some accounts, many people use media for more than half of their waking hours each day, from written/spoken/visual storytelling including film and television, to digital or analog games and aesthetic (e.g. sound, taste, tactile) experiences. This barrage of mediated experience shapes our mediated consciousness, our ongoing simulation of the subjective experiences of others that we engage in as part of constructing our own experience. Mediated consciousness strongly impacts our individual and group identities, moral reasoning, strategic planning in social contexts, and experiences of the environment. It shapes our ability to empathize with select individuals and creates an "empathy deficit" in our dealings with many others, limiting our acceptance of other people's perspectives across ideological, political, or cultural lines. New technology, social media, and augmented reality will continue to stretch and challenge our mediated consciousness. To understand and properly channel these emergent impacts, we must study how mediated consciousness is constructed, what role technology plays in creating these experiences, and how we can control the consequences of these new interactions.

We wish to study this new consciousness and examine how it shapes social and moral behavior, collective identities and animosities, and political and religious commitments. To do so, we propose to establish a Center for the study of cognitive arts and humanities. The Center will support the integration of the arts, humanities, media research, and cognitive science to foster novel emerging research that IU is ideally placed to tackle, with mediated consciousness as its first main target. Our large group includes artists, scientists and researchers from more than a dozen departments. By combining tools and sensibilities from humanities disciplines such as narrative studies, discourse analysis, and hermeneutics with approaches from cognitive science including communication analysis, computer simulation, and psychological experimentation, we are able to base our enquiry on contemporary explanations of how consciousness is constructed while integrating effects of aesthetics, media, and historical context into that process. The Center will include space and the development of special infrastructure to enable virtual and analog simulations of mediated human experience, which in turn will foster experimental studies, teaching, art, and product development (with the aim of sparking industry connections).

Our interdisciplinary approach leads to a number of distinct projects under the initial umbrella topic of mediated consciousness. Each project will iterate between developing new theory of mediated consciousness and empirically testing the resulting ideas, including:

- How mediated narratives can be constructed to increase empathy toward marginalized groups.
- How traditional therapies like role playing can be implemented in virtual reality to increase perspective taking during conflict resolution scenarios or dating situations prone to relationship violence.
- How film, virtual reality, performances, narratives, and games can engage people in situations they are unlikely to experience (solitary confinement, poverty, environmental disaster) and produce lasting positive carry-over effects.
- How attempting to maintain concurrent presence in mediated and physical worlds can affect individuals' relationship quality, attention depth and span, and anxiety level.

Please submit to [earprogram@indiana.edu](mailto:earprogram@indiana.edu)